

**Joan Andrews**  
2508 Deborah Drive  
Punta Gorda, Florida 33950-8157

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February 14, 1996

Before the  
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
Washington, D.C.

In the Matter of  
Closed Captioning and Video Description of Video Programming  
**MM Docket No. 95-176**

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**NOTICE OF INQUIRY**

Comments of Joan Andrews In the Notice of Inquiry Regarding Closed Captioning and Video Description

To The Commission:

Joan Andrews is writing in response to your request for comments in the "Notice of Inquiry", FCC 95-176 in the above-captioned proceeding, released December 4, 1995.

The Commission seeks to assess the current availability, cost, and uses of closed captioning and video description, and to assess what further Commission actions may be appropriate to promote these services. It also seeks comment on the appropriate means of promoting the services wider use in programming delivered by television broadcasters, cable operators, and other video programming providers.

I, Joan Andrews, enjoyed acute hearing until my mid forties when bilateral progressive hearing loss occurred to the extent that I am now profoundly hard of hearing. I rely upon two powerful hearing aids which enable me to understand about a third of what is said if I am in a quiet room listening to a person who enunciates clearly and speaks slowly. I am unable to understand a single word on television and only because of closed captioning do I know what is said on television.

I have been a member of Self Help for Hard of Hearing people (SHHH) on National and Local levels for many years. To a great extent through my association with SHHH and the support and information SHHH provides, I lead a productive and satisfying life in spite of my extreme hearing loss. Because of SHHH I am aware of the importance of the Commission's role in addressing the matter of Closed Captioning. I have no experience with Video Description of Video Programming and therefore my comments do not address that portion of the Notice of Inquiry.

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The sections about which I am commenting are identified by paragraph numbers identifying each issue that I feel qualified to address.

**[Paragraph 11]**

I can not express adequately the importance of Captioned Television Television Captions to me. Starting and ending my day with news of world events is a must since events in my locale as well as world wide happenings have enormous effects on my life. Because I cannot understand a single word on television, *without captions* I would have no access to up to the minute news.

On a lighter side, I welcome the relaxation that television entertainment provides during evenings and weekends when my husband (who has no hearing loss) and I laugh at amusing television programs, compete to get the right answer first on game shows, relate to episodes on situational comedies, and watch TV movies. This enhances the togetherness that we value and enjoy.

Fine drama, such as the recent showing of beautifully captioned Pride and Prejudice adds the welcome element of quality entertainment that I crave.

In the field of Education I am not so fortunate. Local television is providing GED classes two nights a weeks that originate from the Adult Education Department of the local School Board. These televised classes are not captioned. Within the next two years Florida will open its newest university, Florida Gulf Coast University. The Dean of Instructional Technology intends to "take the learning where the learners are" and I am excited about this since I live too far from the university to attend classes. Classes via television will be offered and I fear that unless steps are taken to require that all televised classes are closed captioned I will be denied the benefits of the University's educational opportunities.

In summary, captioned television provides access for me to current news, enhancement of family togetherness, an element of cultural gratification, but at present, no benefits from educational programming.

**[Paragraph 12]**

Reading skills and concentration are greatly enhanced by closed captioning. Speed reading and concentration become automatic since both skills are constantly used when watching captioning. My adult hearing friends marvel that I can "keep up" with reading *and* watching the TV screen. I assure them that with consistent exposure and reliance upon captions, they too would develop these skills. Both skills carry over to reading and comprehending meaning of all reading materials.

Closed captioned programs are a great asset to me during exercise sessions at a local gym. Hearing people who see them enjoy them too; gyms are very noisy and TV dialogue is lost.

**[Paragraph 14 - 16]**

Local (within a twenty five to one hundred mile radius) newscasts are captioned only to the extent of the news read from a prompting board. This eliminates all weather news, all on site reporting, and impromptu dialogue among the individuals delivering the news. It is of grave concern to me that I have to guess about storm alerts and instructions from emergency management personnel. There are print outs of temperature and humidity on the weather board on calm days when I am not at risk from weather disasters. These are informative and convenient, but they are not enough. I live in Florida where I am at risk many times each year when hurricanes and tornadoes threaten. I need the same periodic updates and instructions that hearing people have so that I can protect myself, my family and our property.

On occasion alerting messages scroll across the bottom of the TV screen. It is a brief alert that provides no details and about which, information may be given during an upcoming weather forecast, uncaptioned. The lack of captions about natural and unnatural impending disasters is unacceptable. My TV weather programming originates

primarily from counties with approximate populations of 340,000 and 838,000 people. There are 125,000 people in my County. Consequently like me, thousands of hearing impaired persons in these counties are not protected by captioned announcements and instructions.

The lack of captioning for *on site* reporting is frustrating. A news person sitting in the news room talks about an event that is happening in the community and says that we will learn more from reporter John Doe who is at the scene; I immediately see the scene on my TV and sure enough, there is Mr. Doe talking into his microphone . . . and there are no captions to tell me what he is saying.

Impromptu talk among newscasters is perhaps not valuable so far as learning anything, but it would be nice to know what they are chatting about.

**[Paragraphs 28 - 31]**

A review of programming today from 6 AM to 12 midnight on the 42 channels that are available in my home list eighty eight hours of captioned programming out of a total of seven hundred fifty six hours of television programming. Allowing for a 10% error rate in the TV Guide chart which displays the CC logo to identify captioned programs, it is obvious that equality for full TV access for people who are deaf or hard of hearing is practically non existent. What do we do about this?

Ideally, all programs would be captioned. To this end, I strongly support mandatory captioning. I propose that this be required in increments of hours over the next few years with the increase in numbers of captioned hours dependent upon the annual gross income of television companies. I propose that the additional captioned hours be distributed from the most popular to the least popular viewing times until all programs are captioned.

Accomplishing total television access for people who are Deaf or Hard of

Hearing should be a high priority for the Industry (television broadcasters, cable operators, and other video programming providers) and, once accomplished, a matter of pride.

**[Paragraph 33]**

The quality of captioning consistently improves. Options for placement of captions should however, be addressed. Too often, printed words at the bottom of the screen (often occurring during newscasts) that are never spoken and thus not captioned, are lost behind the captions. The captions should shift temporarily to another position.

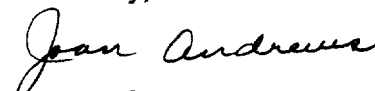
Whenever possible, captions should be placed in front of the person speaking.

Captions that have a more transparent background that allows viewing of the picture behind them would be an improvement.

When music is played, rather than just a word saying "music" or a display of a few musical notes to indicate music, the name of the song should be printed. Music is a mood enhancement and although I can't hear the music, I remember many songs and the mood they suggest. If lyrics are being sung and there is no dialogue for a short time from the actors, the lyrics should be printed.

In conclusion I wish to thank the Commission for the opportunity to comment upon television captioning.

Sincerely,

  
Joan Andrews

**CC:** Brenda Battat, Deputy Executive Director, SHHH

Larry Goldberg, National Caption Center